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ABSTRACT

Although the Minnesota Business Partnership is generally pleased with the success of its school choice initiatives, it realized that more must be done to improve educational quality. Concentrating on learning readiness, this report discusses the role of education in a healthy society, describes the condition of education in Minnesota, and offers recommendations for effecting an education renaissance. Although Minnesota graduates 91 percent of its students entering high school, questions have arisen concerning graduation standards. Also, the dropout rate has been creeping upward for a decade, while Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have dipped below the national average. The larger educational system is suffering from two crises: (1) its academic agenda; and (2) children's learning readiness. Too few families today can provide the readiness and support our children need. Academic program reforms will be of little use unless learning readiness programs are provided for all students. The education problem is a systemic dysfunction confronting our whole society. The Minnesota Business Partnership agenda comprises 13 proposals concerning learning readiness, early childhood education, access to education, research and development, assessment of education outcomes, education mandates, the school calendar, administrative organization, education finance, teaching, cultural diversity, parental involvement, and student employment. (MLH)

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A Report of
The
Minnesota Business
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March 1991



Minnesota Business Partnership K-12 Education Quality Task Force

MEMBERS

Andrew P. Czajkowski, Blue Cross/Blue Shield
William C. Cooper, TCF Bank fsb
George C. Halvorson, Group Health Inc.
Gary R. Holland, DataCard Corp.
Ron James, U.S. West Communications
David A. Koch, Graco, Inc.
William Lurton, Jostens, Inc.
Robert Price (retired), Control Data Corp.
Gerald A. Rauenhurst, Opus Corporation
Dr. James L. Reinertson, Park Nicollet Medical Center
James J. Renier (Chair), Honeywell Inc.
John A. Rollwagen, Cray Research

DEPUTIES

Jane Belau, Control Data Corp.
John Cairns, Briggs & Morgan
Linda Ellwein, Group Health Inc.
Terry Erskine, Northwest Airlines
Richard Green, Honeywell Inc.
Scott Johnson, Bemis Company
Bill Linder-Scholer, Cray Research
Tom Lindquist, Unisys
Becky Malkerson, First Bank System
Dave Nasby, General Mills
Dick Niemiec, Blue Cross/Blue Shield
Valerie Pace, IBM
William Roberts, National Computer Systems
Dave Schoeneck, Graco, Inc.
Laurisa Sellers, Honeywell Inc.
Ron Speed, Honeywell Inc.
Arlys Stadum, U.S. West Communications
Sharon Tolbert-Glover, St. Paul Companies
Joanne Whiterabbit, Cray Research

STAFF

Paula Prael, Minnesota Business Partnership
Tom Triplett, Minnesota Business Partnership

The Minnesota Business Partnership is an association of the Chief Executive Officers of 95 of Minnesota's largest corporations. The Partnership was created in 1977, and its mission is to promote a healthy economic and social environment for all Minnesotans. Our goal is to create an environment that will attract quality jobs to Minnesota and that will permit us to keep the ones we already have.

In addition to education quality improvement, Partnership goals include: providing a favorable tax and spending climate for Minnesota government, controlling government-imposed costs on the workplace, promoting broad access to a basic level of health care for all Minnesotans, reducing the costs of civil litigation to Minnesota society, and helping Minnesota state government to become more efficient and productive in its operations.

For further information about the Partnership and its work, contact Tom Triplett, Executive Director, at (612) 370-0840.



March, 1991

Fellow Minnesotans:

On behalf of my colleagues in the Minnesota Business Partnership, I hope you find this Report informative and useful. I also hope you agree with our recommendations and are willing to join the effort to improve Minnesota's schools.

After months of conversations with Minnesota educators, parents and students, we conclude that our schools are not fundamentally "broken." We found, however, that major change is needed in many elements of our system. Such change does not necessarily mean more dollars, but it does mean improved efficiency and outcomes for all of our students, not just the few who are thriving now.

Most of our report's recommendations focus on what we call "learning readiness." The evidence is overwhelming that far too many of our children are not ready to learn when they enter kindergarten, and they remain not ready to learn as they proceed through high school. Remedies for this problem include intensive early childhood education and better coordination of social service programs for our children.

We have specific recommendations designed to make school organization and funding more rational, fair and cost-efficient. We also call for redefining the roles played by persons most directly involved in education: educators themselves, parents and students.

The work of the Business Partnership is not done; throughout this Report, we note the need for business to provide implementation assistance to our schools. In addition, more study is needed to help refine our schools' "academic agenda." These tasks require much additional work, and we in the Partnership pledge to be a constructive force as these efforts proceed.

Dr. James J. Renier
Chair, MBP Education Quality Task Force
Chairman and CEO, Honeywell, Inc.



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Introduction

The Minnesota Business Partnership has been involved in education issues since the early 1980's. This involvement began out of the concerns of business leaders that our education systems were not producing the quality of graduate necessary for the increasingly complex jobs of our future. Also, the Partnership members believed that the maintenance of education quality was essential to preserving our state's high quality of life.

In the mid 1980's, the Partnership produced a series of recommendations designed to promote excellence through competition in our school systems. The MBP recommended that the legislature adopt various "Choice" programs for Minnesota schools. Beginning with the 1990-91 school year, the Choice initiatives have been fully implemented in Minnesota — the first state to accomplish this goal.

Although pleased with the success of its Choice initiatives in Minnesota and around the country, the Partnership quickly realized that Choice in and of itself does not guarantee quality education. Therefore, the Partnership began in the Spring of 1990 to consult with educators, parents and teachers in Minnesota. From dozens of meetings, both large and small, in the metro and Greater Minnesota regions, came a series of observations and findings about Minnesota's education systems. These observations and findings led, in turn, to this Report.

Acknowledgments

The MBP Education Quality Task Force wishes to acknowledge and thank the hundreds of people who gave their ideas to the Task Force. We particularly want to acknowledge Minnesota's many excellent school superintendents who took it upon themselves to review and comment on the multitudes of observations, findings and recommendations discussed at various times during the course of our meetings. Without the assistance of all of these dedicated educators and supporters of education, this Report would not have been possible.



Education and the Healthy Society

Americans have always believed that education is the fastest and surest route to personal success, economic prosperity and social progress.

Their faith has been justified. Education, accompanied by abundant natural resources and a rigorous work ethic, has made Americans the richest — and most envied — people of the world. American democracy, built on a philosophy of nearly universal education, has become the most rewarding — and most admired — of the world's social systems.

Continued progress in this country will demand continued attainment in education — whether progress is measured in personal achievement, social well-being or our ability to compete in global markets.

Currently, jobs in this country require a median of 12.5 years of education. A high school education is no longer enough, whereas an elementary education was adequate for most workers when we were a rural, agricultural nation. The educational demand will continue to grow. Jobs created in this decade will require 13.5 years of education. Today, less than 25 percent of jobs require a college degree; about one-third will by the year 2000.

Continued progress in this country will demand continued attainment in education — whether progress is measured in personal achievement, social well-being or our ability to compete in global markets.

But while educational requirements are rising, educational attainment is not. In addition, other issues compound the problem.

Every eight seconds of the school day, an American child drops out of school. Almost a third of our ninth-grade students fail to graduate from high school with their class — a figure that has not improved in two decades. In Japan, the dropout rate is six percent, and literacy is virtually universal.

Even the students who do graduate are not holding their own in world competition. In an assessment made in 1986, the average American 13-year old could understand basic math operations and beginning problem solving. But Korean 13-year olds could solve

two-step math problems. In science, U.S. students placed second to last, able to understand and apply only the simplest scientific principles. Korean students were able to use scientific procedures and analyze scientific data.

The U. S. Department of Education concluded that "stagnation on a relatively low level appears to describe the level of performance of American students on the various national assessments."

If we allow Magazine's time bomb to tick down to zero hour, we will lose our leadership in world business, and we will also lose other values that are less measurable, but perhaps even more important.

By some measurements, "stagnation" has become deterioration. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores remained fairly constant through the 1960's. But during the 70's, both math and verbal scores plummeted, and today they still have not regained their historic highs.

What we know about education today does not bode well for our ability to compete in world business tomorrow. Alan Magazine, President of The Council on Competitiveness has written:

We have, in a sense, a ticking time bomb that can't be ignored anymore. Some people have been saying that for years, but now people in the corporations are really seeing it. They're seeing it in the kinds of people they're hiring, the amount of money they have to spend for basic learning to get people up to a level that they can do even menial jobs; they're seeing it in the results of the tests that they give hundreds of people for minimum-wage jobs, and the numbers of people who actually pass those tests.

If we allow Magazine's time bomb to tick down to zero hour, we will lose our leadership in world business, and we will also lose other values that are less measurable, but perhaps even more important.

Where there is inadequate education there are cycles of economic want, lost personal opportunities, and wasted potential for independent, productive citizenship. An under-educated society is not a free society. We need knowledge, understanding and the discipline of clear thinking to make the decisions required in a functioning democracy.



Education in Minnesota

Minnesota advertises itself as "the Brainpower State." And it has the academic record to back it up. We have justly taken pride in our impressive high school graduation rate, our high literacy levels, and our knowledgeable and skillful workforce.

But our state has not escaped the national trends in education. While Minnesota graduates 91 percent of its students entering high school and ranks first in the nation, there is a question of whether our requirements are rigorous enough. Further, the percentage of dropouts has been creeping upward for a decade. While the graduation rate increased for American Indian and Black students (from low levels), it went down for White, Hispanic and Asian students, resulting in a loss overall.

Predictably, dropout rates are highest in larger cities, reaching nearly 11 percent in Minneapolis and St. Paul. "We're graduating 91 percent of our kids," said a top official of the state Department of Education, "but that's not nearly enough. It's not okay to throw away ten percent of our kids."

For ten years, informed observers of the Minnesota educational scene have felt a growing sense of anxiety and frustration. From some of that frustration and anxiety arose creative and forward-looking change in the educational system. The Legislature's enactment, with strong Minnesota Business Partnership support, of "open enrollment," "post-secondary option," and "high school graduation incentive" programs signaled a new freedom for students and families in designing appropriate educational opportunities.

Concern for the education system also provoked unsuccessful change. The "Minnesota Miracle," touted in part as a plan to reduce financial disparities among districts in the early 1970's, failed ultimately to do so. Financial inequity is an even larger issue in Minnesota education today.

Inequities aside, Minnesotans have been generous in funding. In the past decade, the education portion of the state budget, over and above increases in local school district spending, has doubled from \$1 billion per year to \$2 billion.

Because of this dramatic increase in spending, taxpayers might well expect clear evidence that our students' educational performance is edging higher. But the needle has not moved. On the contrary, recognized measurements show that performance has in fact declined.

Deteriorating performance is evident even among the 90 percent of students who remain in high school to graduation. Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota rank one, two and three in the nation in American College Test (ACT) scores, respectively. But in the years from 1969 to 1989 the Minnesota scores have trended lower, dropping more than the national average.

Traditionally, Minnesota has overcome certain economic handicaps—our demanding climate, distance from national markets, distance from either ocean—by offering its companies a telling advantage: a smarter workforce that has a better education and is quicker to learn.

In addition, during the same timeframe, the state's Scholastic Aptitude Test and Advance Placement scores have continued in a steady decline and fallen to close the national average. The Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Tests scores have actually dipped below the national average.

Even though test scores and data on dropouts fail to paint the whole picture, this information comes as a rude shock to Minnesotans who pride themselves on the state's tradition of intellectual attainment. "We found," reported the Office of the Legislative Auditor in a recent report, "strong evidence that Minnesota's reputation is overstated and out of date."



The trend in education has disturbed no one more than the state's business leaders. Traditionally, Minnesota has overcome certain economic handicaps — our demanding climate, distance from national markets, distance from either ocean — by offering its companies a telling advantage: a smarter workforce that has a better education and is quicker to learn.

Now, with the educational barometer falling to the national average or below, that advantage may be blown away, and Minnesota businesses could be in for some heavy weather. In a state that has been successful in attracting investments by high tech companies, a drooping learning curve is particularly foreboding.

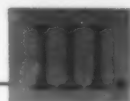
Employers are now observing that the lower third of job applicants are unqualified even for the least-skilled jobs. In the past, there were always some jobs that required little or no education. Now, with few exceptions, all jobs demand basic math and verbal skills. And, higher levels of mastery are required for virtually every *new* job being created. Yet, average Minnesota eleventh-graders today are unable to read as well as teachers think they should read.

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"Business groups have intense concerns about the quality and efficiency of primary and secondary schools," concluded a research report by the Minnesota Department of Trade and Economic Development. The report indicated that elementary and secondary education are rated as the most important government functions by Minnesota companies. But fewer than half of those companies — and only 27 percent of the surveyed high technology firms — are even somewhat satisfied with the education being delivered.

Among the 50 states, Minnesota with its record of high academic attainment, may have the most to lose. But with our traditional faith in education and habit of community responsibility, we may also have the most to gain.

Concern is growing across the country about education, and Minnesota is not immune. Among the 50 states, Minnesota with its record of high academic attainment, may have the most to lose. But with our traditional faith in education and habit of community responsibility, we may also have the most to gain.



Learning Readiness—A Key to Learning

The education system is more than the schools. The system comprises all the institutions and processes, public and private, that prepare children to learn, support and encourage their learning, provide facilities for learning, make knowledge available and attractive, and coach children in the learning process.

Therefore, our "education system" includes students, their families, state and local governments, social agencies, business, and taxpayers, as well as schools.

In most of the United States, including Minnesota, these elements of the system are out of sync. There is an alarming lack of coordination between the elements. What used to be the mission of schools is no longer complete, and the new mission, along with the role for all elements of the system, is not defined.

The agenda for education—as currently viewed—is really the sum of two major elements: the academic program and the learning readiness requirements for that program. Instead of one crisis, the larger educational system is suffering from crises on two fronts.

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The first crisis relates to the *academic agenda* of education. We need to restructure the process and content of instruction. We must be sure that we are teaching our students the proper topics and that they are learning what they need to know for the jobs of their futures. We must be sure that we have evaluation and accountability mechanisms to insure that weaknesses are identified and change implemented.

The second crisis relates to the ability of children to learn—their *learning readiness*. To meet society's demands for improved educational achievement, our children must surmount a myriad of social and family problems. Teachers are finding themselves performing nontraditional and unfamiliar tasks formerly performed by the family. The schools are not equipped to respond successfully to both these priorities at the same time.

Children cannot learn until and unless they are ready to learn.

Children cannot learn until and unless they are ready to learn. Educators say that knowledge cannot be injected into students. Teachers can coach and encourage, but students have to do the work. And students can only work if they are physically fit, mentally and socially well developed, and inspired to gain and use knowledge.

The inadequate educational attainment among students and the excessive dropout rate in later school years are attributable, to a large degree, to a lack of learning readiness from the first years of school.

More and more people are understanding that "early childhood education"—programs for young children before they enter kindergarten—is an important aspect of learning readiness and is the foundation for continued learning readiness. Although early childhood education is a critical element for later success, early childhood programs by themselves are not enough.

Learning readiness needs to be seen as a continuum from birth (and in fact from conception) throughout formal education. Too few families today are able to provide the readiness and support our children need. Healthy babies begin the chain—followed by the right nurturing, nutrition and development.

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The Changing Family and Its Impact on Learning Readiness

A revealing index of change is the increasing number of families in which both the father and mother work outside the home. For 20 years, the fastest growing segment of the U.S. labor force has been married women with young children. Seventy-three percent of mothers with school-age children have jobs. Many of them must work; if they did not, 35 percent more families would be living in poverty.

But even two jobs per family do not guarantee affluence. In fact, most poor parents work full-time the year round. But they may have jobs at the minimum wage, earning roughly \$7000, while the poverty line for a family of four is nearly double that.

Almost a quarter of all children under six years of age live in poor families. They face the gravest risks. *The Unfinished Agenda*, a report prepared by the Committee for Economic Development, shows that among family-related causes, poverty is a key reason for the failure of education:

Children born and reared in poverty generally suffer a multitude of debilitating health, emotional, social and family problems that can impede learning. These children usually start school poorly prepared for formal school work (and) many disadvantaged children fall farther and farther behind until poor performance, low self-esteem, alienation and frustration cause them to drop out.

In Minnesota, the plight of children in poverty has been increasing for the past decade. In 1980, 89,000 children received monthly AFDC assistance; by 1989 the number had grown to more than 105,000. (And this growth occurred during a period when the total number of children in the state actually declined.)

In 1984, 54,000 Minnesota women were on the Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). By 1990, the number had grown to 76,000. While births to teenage mothers decreased during the 1980's, births to unwed teenagers and to all single women increased nearly 60 percent, from less than eight thousand to more than 12,000 in 1988.

The problems of poverty, while they may appear different, are no more acute in metropolitan Minnesota than outstate.

For a decade, Minnesotans have been aware of the growing problems of children who live in poverty. We know there are ways to help children overcome the debilitating learning handicap of simply being poor. We have ample demonstrations of programs that can work to break the generation-to-generation cycle of inadequate learning, poverty, despair and neglect. But we have not done enough to install and expand these programs.

In 1989, we had 6000 of our children in Head Start; but we had another 16,000 who were eligible but could not be served. In 1988, our state's child care fund helped provide service to 10,000 families with 14,000 children, but that was only 32 percent of eligible families.

We have the tools to help children. We know what works and what does not. If we are to improve the education process, we must use these tools to reinforce the efforts of Minnesota families as they prepare their children to learn. The efforts of the schools to improve instruction and the academic program will not reach their potential unless we do a better job of learning readiness — and that means readiness for kindergarten and every morning of every school day thereafter until graduation.

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Lack of Learning Readiness and the Academic Program

We can, and probably should, reform the academic agenda for our schools. However, academic reforms will be of little use unless we first provide adequate and effective learning readiness programs for all of our students. The lack of physical health, mental development, emotional stability, and the desire to learn has created a crisis for our children — a crisis that society as a whole has helped to create, but one that we have dumped at the school house door.

According to researchers in the Department of Education, "Many Minnesota children and youth come to school each day with personal, family, and social problems that interfere with learning, school attendance, progress toward graduation and future



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employability. The problems these young people face are frequently multifaceted and inter-related. Simply put, problems tend to come in packages."

Given these "packages" to deal with, the schools are being overwhelmed. In interviews with school superintendents, the Minnesota Business Partnership found that student performance is deteriorating due to "unsettling, sometimes chaotic family situations," and that "schools and teachers are forced to provide an increasing number of 'social services' for students."

The president of one of the state's teacher unions told us that "what we used to call 'teaching' is now morning-to-night service to families. Some days it looks like nobody else is helping."

With schools being pulled in several directions, there is, in the mind of educators, growing confusion about their mission. They repeatedly told the Partnership that before teachers can teach, they are forced to provide an increasing number of learning readiness services in all their physical, intellectual and behavioral aspects.

Even in schools where class size has been reduced, too much of the time and energy of teachers is absorbed by the unmet social and developmental needs of their students. Thus, students who are not ready to learn deprive other students of equal instruction time.

The problem of class size can be expressed as a problem of learning readiness. If every student were ready and eager to learn, teachers could work with more students in each class.

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Services schools are now asked to perform range far beyond the traditional teaching mission of the schools. They are providing social services that used to be the responsibilities of families. Few of them are prepared with the professional skills and supporting resources to deal with social requirements of this magnitude.

Role of the Entire Community in Solving the Problem

It is clear that the problem of education is not a "school problem"—it is a dysfunction of the whole education system, both learning readiness and academic programs. It is a problem that confronts our whole society.

To get education back on track, our whole society, sooner or later, must participate. This includes families, governments, social service agencies, businesses and the schools. The challenge is to coalesce the abilities and resources of the multiple service providers in our entire community to coordinate services for children.

This coordination of services needs to happen not only within government but more importantly within the private sector. We can no longer thwart real progress in academic achievement and educational reform by ignoring the necessity of learning readiness. We can no longer afford to cloud the mission of schools with society's responsibilities. Each component of society is responsible, and each will benefit as the problem is erased.

We can no longer afford to cloud the mission of schools with society's responsibilities.

The school should be the place for the delivery of most of these services. That is not to say that teachers should be the service providers. Quite the contrary. As we say quite explicitly later in this report, teachers should focus on the academic agenda; they should not be distracted by learning readiness problems.

Nor are we saying that "traditional" social service agencies should be expected to carry the full weight of these programs. More contributions are needed from other elements in the community. Businesses themselves need to assume a much more active role in providing these needed services to our schools.



Recommendation for an Educational Renaissance

Just as all of society will reap the benefits of an improved education system, all segments of the community must cooperate in bringing them about.

This community-wide focus and investment invites a problem of coordination. How do we align the activities of local social service agencies with the state education bureaucracies? How do we mesh the objectives of a school board with those of the city and county governments? Is business prepared to do its part?

Based upon our extensive analysis and consultations, we in the Minnesota Business Partnership believe that consensus is possible both on the nature of the problem and the general direction toward the solution.

We found that impediments to a complete and successful education for all Minnesota children range across a wide field of barriers. For example:

Early childhood education is crucial to learning readiness and is not currently supported at the level necessary.

Opportunities to support and enhance the teaching profession are often hindered by our current practices of compensation.

We do not attract enough outstanding people to the teaching profession, and we do not provide future teachers with a solid grounding in the "learning readiness" issues that they will face in the classroom.

The schools do not provide enough opportunities for parental involvement.

There is a serious question about the harmful effects of student employment on learning.

The funding structures for education are too far removed from the actual spending decisions and fail to provide incentives for cost-saving.

The Partnership does not expect easy resolution of the disparate problems of this magnitude. But we do hope that our recommendations will initiate and facilitate a process that will engage every part of the broad Minnesota community.

It is in this spirit that the Partnership offers this report as a starting point. It is clear that substantial additional work is necessary to organize to effect the change which we seek. Throughout our recommendations, we offer specific ways in which we and our colleagues in the Minnesota business community can be of assistance. We pledge to Minnesota our continued constructive involvement in education improvement.

The talent and commitment exist in Minnesota to accomplish the tasks before us. We in the Partnership are prepared to play our part in the solution, but we also know that we cannot do it alone. All elements of the Minnesota community must be involved. Without the cooperation of all, success is doomed; with cooperation and joint commitment, success is possible.

Specific Proposals

The Minnesota Business Partnership's program described here comprises 13 proposals — unnumbered because none have priority over others; all are of equal urgency. Each proposal contains four central points: one or more introductory findings based on our conversations with Minnesotans interested in education quality, a central conclusion drawn from those findings, recommendations for reform, and specific strategies for implementing those recommendations.

Many of the following specific recommendations deal with the learning readiness issue. Other recommendations deal with the school site and the persons involved in the education process.

Few of our recommendations deal directly with the academic agenda. By this omission, we do not mean to suggest that there are no problems with this element of Minnesota education. We believe problems do exist in this area and that significant reforms are needed.

However, we deeply believe that we must first focus our efforts on learning readiness and the other issues identified in the following pages. We must first make significant progress on these matters. Only then can we take on the difficult problems associated with the academic agenda.



LEARNING READINESS

The mission of education in Minnesota and the nation lacks clarity. As the activities occurring in our schools have changed, we have not prioritized their relative importance, nor have we given them proper attention and resources.

Our schools are simultaneously offering an array of "social" and "academic" programs which we call public education. On the one hand, we seek to promote general knowledge and critical thinking. On the other hand, we are trying to meet the unmet social and developmental needs of learners. Our schools are, in essence, assuming more and more of the responsibilities formerly carried by American families.

This mixture of functions and goals impedes the ability to improve the overall quality of American and Minnesota education. Our schools are trying to fill roles that are difficult to understand and articulate.

Many persons would prefer that our schools not attempt to replace traditional family activities. On the other hand, research has shown that too many students are burdened by social problems that impede their academic performance. These students are not "ready to learn."

Conclusion:

The mission of education is unclear; the social agenda of schools competes for resources and staff time with the academic agenda. Students are increasingly in need of social services and programs to attain learning readiness. Consequently, too many non-academic burdens are taken on by teachers. The mixing of these two agendas has caused confusion about the overall mission of education.

Recommendations:

- All affected state and local agencies must cooperate to insure that all students in Minnesota's schools are ready to learn each and every day of the year. The state's various support programs for families and children need to work together to make sure that every child can take full advantage of the education offered.
- Teachers should play a primary role in the assessment of learning readiness in students, and teachers should be provided with effective referral systems for learning readiness programs. Teachers should not, however, be seen as the primary providers of learning readiness programs. Removing many learning readiness service responsibilities for teachers will make them better able to perform their principal academic functions.
- The private sector should act as a catalyst in the community for discussion regarding learning readiness. The state should coordinate information for use in community discussions which highlights the importance of learning readiness and provides examples of how learning readiness can be improved through community involvement.
- Leaders in government, education, business and the community should develop long-range goals for support of children and youth programs in general and learning readiness programs in particular.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Legislature by law or the Governor by executive order should enact the Minnesota Readiness to Learn Act or other similar initiative designed to integrate social service programs into a comprehensive support effort for schools.
- State business and education leaders should jointly review efforts such as "Cities in Schools" for their possible replication in Minnesota.
- Minnesota Business Partnership members and other major state employers should initiate meetings within school districts to enlist employee volunteers to assist in school readiness programs, and to encourage coordination of readiness programs provided by public and non-profit agencies.



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Traditionally, formal American education has begun at age five. Preparing students to meet the social and intellectual demands of kindergarten was seen as the role for families. This "school readiness" function has always been absolutely essential to future success in school.

The degree of school readiness exhibited by many five year olds is no longer adequate, and this absence of readiness has introduced new challenges for which the school system is not prepared.

One of the results of inadequate levels of school readiness is a growing percentage of school dropouts. Research shows that improved school readiness could well have the greatest effect at the lowest cost in reducing dropouts.

Although the research evidence is clear, there is still no widespread public understanding of the importance of early childhood programs, and their positive impact on school readiness, to the overall education system. While many systems have some types of early childhood programs, the priority assigned to these efforts is not consistent with the significance of their effect.

While there are many questions about the most appropriate location and management structure for these programs, the ultimate goal must be school readiness for all children. None of the present infrastructures are prepared to deal with the numbers of children requiring these programs.

Conclusion:

- Effective early childhood education programs are needed for all Minnesota children, and such programs are crucial to the learning readiness continuum.

Recommendations:

- A strong and effective early childhood development program must be included as a part of the mission of the state's education system.
- Minnesota business organizations and individual businesses should actively support such programs.
- Special programs should be developed to meet the needs of pregnant and parenting teens and their children.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Legislature should enact recommendations from the Child Care Task Force of the Legislative Commission on the Economic Status of Women which call for the re-direction of current state spending to child care programs and increased coordination of service delivery.
- The Minnesota Business Partnership, in conjunction with other business organizations, should continue to study business participation in shared business-education facilities and should promote joint ventures with education institutions and programs.
- The Legislature and relevant state and local agencies should reduce nonessential building code and related requirements, or be generous in granting waivers from such requirements, in order to facilitate the location of early childhood education programs in alternative facilities.
- The Minnesota Business Partnership, in conjunction with other business groups, should further study and catalogue programs designed for parenting and pregnant teens and early childhood programs. Businesses, working with local school systems, should consider establishing on-site programs targeted to pregnant and parenting teens. These and other support programs should be promoted for replication within the education and business communities.



ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Historically, American society has not been overly concerned about full access to education. For much of our history, formal education was not required for all Americans. Many jobs were available that did not require a high school education but did provide a level of income sufficient to support a family.

Over the last decade, an increasing number of occupations have come to require higher skill levels. At the same time, however, our country is faced with a declining number of available workers.

Our education system has not expanded its access to respond to these trends. We continue to rely on an education system that is intended to serve all, but which realistically serves only some. Most schools do a good job of educating about one-third of their students, a passable job with another one-third, and an unsatisfactory job with the remaining third.

It is now more important than ever that we educate all of our children.

Changing the current system will not be easy. Many established institutions will fight to preserve the current system, fearing that change will bring increased competition for success.

Conclusion:

- We can no longer afford to fail to educate all students to their full potential. Our future competitiveness is dependent upon developing the potential in each student. In the future, each young person who does not have the academic, workforce and citizenship skills to be productive will unlikely be successful in later life.

Recommendations:

- A vision and message must be espoused that all children can and should learn and that it is to everyone's benefit for all children to learn much more than in the past.
- Learning readiness and academic programs should be tailored as appropriate for each student. All school programs should be designed to assure that all students achieve their full potential.
- Local community leaders, media, and civic groups should work to create a community learning culture and support a network through which all children can more easily acquire high skill levels.
- Efforts must accelerate to increase public awareness of the importance of extending education to all students.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Minnesota Business Partnership and other business organizations should express support for full implementation of learning readiness programs and outcome-based education in classrooms and should actively offer assistance with the development of desired outcomes and goals.
- The Legislature should insure that appropriate support and re-directed resources are provided for the full implementation of outcome-based education.
- The Department of Education, when evaluating each school district's outcome-based education standards, should stress the importance of individual student development to the fullest extent of each student's abilities.
- The business community, in conjunction with government and community leaders, should promote public understanding of the necessity of educating all students and the importance of learning readiness.



RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The educational system's research and development program carries insufficient priority. One of the indicators of this lack of priority is inadequate time and resources for training and development of teachers. Another indicator is the frequency with which reform programs are thrown at districts, often with unrealistic expectations regarding implementation and desired outcomes.

Very few educational reform efforts are developed with a clear plan for replication. This means that the educational system faces a problem familiar to many businesses: the difficulty of technology and innovation transfer.

Conclusion:

More research application is needed to fuel education improvement. Schools are too often burdened with untested new reform ideas. The state should avoid overly standardized reform plans: education needs differ widely throughout the state, and there is not a universally acceptable solution to education improvement.

Recommendations:

- The Department of Education should provide research necessary to support local districts' reform decisions. Current efforts in R&D need to be expanded to include study of learning readiness and should link health and human service agencies in the R&D initiatives. The state should assess the types of R&D occurring in individual districts (two examples are the magnet schools in St. Paul and the programs in the Cyrus district) to promote information transfer as well as determine state R&D priorities.
- Quality education R&D requires close linkages with the state's institutions of higher education and colleges of education. Teacher training needs to expand to include R&D application and learning readiness concepts.
- State-wide educational R&D initiatives should adopt an industry R&D model with an emphasis on development of the ability to transfer technology.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Legislature should support the maintenance of current R&D initiatives of the Department of Education and the ten state-wide R&D sites for outcome-based education.
- The Department of Education should augment its current initiatives with study of R&D initiatives emanating from other states and state organizations and from local district activities within Minnesota.
- Businesses engaged in relevant R&D should offer assistance with technology and innovation transfer and application of an industry R&D model to education.
- The Minnesota Business Partnership should provide coordination for a Research Advisory Board linking the state's institutions of higher education, K-12 leadership and business leaders.



ASSESSMENT

Measurement of outcomes, or assessment, must be a critical part of our educational system. Given all of the resources put into education, and the phenomenal importance of the success of education's mission, it is imperative that we have the ability to measure how well we are doing in preparing our children for the jobs and society of tomorrow.

Meaningful assessment of education outcomes has proven extraordinarily difficult. In part, this difficulty is a reflection of the multiple objectives education must meet. Schools are trying to accomplish multiple goals, and they have ineffective tools for measuring their success.

A high degree of clarity about expectations is necessary before the appropriate measurement tools can be developed. This is a challenging task, and business may be in a position to contribute to this effort.

Conclusion:

Assessment tools are necessary and appropriate for education, but there is currently no fully acceptable set of tools. Statewide understanding of educational goals is critical to the determination of proper assessment tools.

Recommendations:

- The state should identify general education goals for state students and provide districts with a variety of proven assessment tools which can measure progress toward those goals. These statewide goals and assessment tools should be developed in concert with a comprehensive effort to establish a shared understanding of educational goals.
- The assessment tools should address both the academic achievement of students and their learning readiness. These two areas should be linked when discussing and assessing student achievement.
- Businesses and higher education should be actively involved in the development of desired outcomes particular to their respective fields. Requirements for entry into those fields and institutions should reinforce and be consistent with these desired outcomes.
- Decisions regarding individual district's or school's methods for achieving stated goals must be made at the school and district levels; they should not be mandated from the state. However, individual district goals and methods must be compatible with broad state goals.

- Districts and schools should establish and meet assessment standards which are consistent with state goals and which reflect unique situations within each district and school.
- Districts and schools should be rewarded for successful completion of goals and standards.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Minnesota Business Partnership should coordinate with and support the Minnesota Academic Excellence Foundation/Quality Council pilot project on school quality assessments and should support eventual state-wide adoption of similar quality assessment programs.
- The Legislature should direct a study to develop a full complement of assessment tools. The study should suggest replication, where appropriate, of other states' assessment programs. Suggested assessment tools should be consistent with state-wide goals for schools and should include assessment of learning readiness in students. The resulting plan should be implemented in 1993.
- Business leaders should offer assistance and should be involved in the establishment of outcome standards for assessment.
- Once the goals are established and assessment tools developed and implemented, the Legislature should provide that at least a portion of education funding should be awarded on the basis of success in meeting established assessment goals or a pre-determined standard of continuous quality improvement.



EDUCATION MANDATES

Uncertainty about where education policy decisions should be made is caused, in part, by the complexity of the mission education is trying to address. School superintendents and other educators frequently complain about the continuing increase in legislative mandates and interference with the operation of schools.

State-imposed mandates perpetuate the micromanagement of the academic function and the continued expansion of the "social curriculum." They also lead to a general dilution of the entire academic effort because they are often imposed without the means to carry them out. As a result, the entire program suffers.

Without a release from the state's micromanagement, reforms like "School Choice" have little chance of success. As long as schools must respond to numerous mandates and requirements, there is little opportunity to create enough different schools to make Choice a reality.

The state's waiver of requirements and procedures can help schools overcome barriers to reform that are codified in rules and regulations. School districts have made infrequent use of this procedure. Waivers alone, however, will not generate the major overhaul of education desired, but they are an important part of the equation.

Conclusion:

The operation of our schools is overburdened by legislative, Department of Education and Board of Education mandates.

Recommendations:

- The number of statutory and rule mandates should be reduced.
- Application for and the liberal granting of waivers to remaining statutory and rule mandates should be encouraged.
- Mechanisms need to be developed to provide training, technical assistance and support to schools and districts which desire to take advantage of the waiver provisions.
- The state's Department of Education should focus on the provision of service to districts in addition to its current role of school regulation.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Department of Education should invite suggestions from school districts on mandates needing repeal or liberalization and encourage the Department to propose necessary actions to repeal.
- In the 1991 session and thereafter, the Legislature should repeal unnecessary or counterproductive mandates, and should insure that the Board and Department are given waiver authority in respect to remaining mandates.
- For remaining mandates, the Board or Department, as appropriate, should adopt a policy encouraging the use of waivers in situations where locally-desired changes will result in more successful education improvement.



SCHOOL CALENDAR

One particular mandate is deserving of special attention.

The Legislature has determined that school districts must follow a rigid yearly calendar. This calendar is not based on anything related to academic excellence and is shorter than the school calendars in neighboring states as well as school calendars in other parts of the world. The calendar appears to be based on economic factors and tradition. Further, it seems to have no relationship to efficient capital utilization.

Many students have different rates of learning and limited access to cultural, recreational, and library facilities, all of which could be enhanced by extension of the school year or day. Most superintendents insist that a longer school year is absolutely necessary.

Conclusion:

Our short school calendar, with its artificial constraints, impedes education improvement. The calendar is no longer relevant nor competitive.

Recommendations:

- The optimum length of school year should be determined. This may vary depending on a district's or school's needs but should adequately take into account the time and resources needed to insure both learning readiness and academic achievement.
- Those organizations that have lobbied for particular constraints on the school year calendar should be brought together to work on solutions that address their concerns and the state's concern for quality education.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Legislature should review and adopt general guidelines for the school year calendar. Relevant laws should allow flexibility within individual districts.
- The State Board should continue to provide waivers for school year length.



EDUCATION ORGANIZATION

Minnesota has a very large number of school districts. These districts vary in size from 89 students to 38,742 students. Over 70% of our students are educated in only 20% of our school districts.

There is debate about the optimum size of districts and the effect that size has on education quality. The state has not developed criteria which would lead to the optimization of the number of school districts.

Minnesota also has a large number of intermediary education structures. Some of these were established to serve as "super districts"; others serve as central suppliers of various sorts of school services. The role for these organizations, and whether they should be required as a matter of law, has generated much controversy.

Finally, there is growing interest in de-centralizing education policy and other decision-making. Principals, teachers and parents at the local level are expressing increased support for local decision-making models.

Restructuring is needed within the school building as well. Principals have become building administrators rather than supervisors and leaders of teachers. The time of principals is often filled with administrative activities leaving little time for meaningful supervision and leadership. Even if such time is made available, however, many principals are inadequately prepared and supported to handle new roles and responsibilities.

Conclusion:

The organization of education, with multiple levels of governance, is not efficient nor conducive to education improvement. In some instances, there appear to be too many layers of administration with decisions being made at points too far removed from the actual delivery of education. More power to change is needed within the school building, but adequate training and support for this new function is also needed.

Recommendations:

- Strategies should be studied and implemented to reduce both the size of the over-arching education bureaucracy and the multi-agency requirements placed on school districts.
- Portions of the educational delivery system in Minnesota should be aggressively decentralized. If particular functions or requirements such as the core academic agenda are the same across the state, then management for those functions should be appropriately centralized. For those functions that require local determinations, the management should be decentralized.
- School site management should be encouraged in order to empower principals, teachers, parents and students toward enhanced performance. Appropriate support, technical assistance and training need to be given to teachers and principals to enhance school site management.
- Local superintendents and school boards should be provided with technical assistance and support to help them develop policies and strategies to facilitate the new roles and responsibilities of teachers and principals.
- Teachers with appropriate participatory leadership skills should be identified and encouraged to use those skills in school site management.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Department of Education should expand with legislative support the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Plan which promotes and supports school site management.
- The Legislature should build on the work of the Task Force on Education Organization and enact legislation which reduces the number and levels of education bureaucracy at the state and intermediary levels.
- Minnesota business should support efforts leading to the reduction in the number of school districts so long as such efforts are premised on objective rationale and do not serve to jeopardize education quality.
- Minnesota business, working with school systems, should help develop and implement management and leadership training programs for superintendents and principals.



EDUCATION FINANCE

Education finance is a complex and emotional issue in the state. Many persons equate education success with the degree of funding per student. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to equate funding with performance. What is clear is that funding alone is not the answer to education quality improvement.

Gross comparisons of funding levels can be seriously misleading. The challenges facing school districts differ significantly across the state: the underlying set of characteristics about students and needs in Minneapolis are, for example, very different from those in Moorhead or Austin.

Instruction costs vary greatly from district to district, depending on such variables as the age of the buildings and the district's rate of growth. Also, the per student costs for the necessary learning readiness programs vary greatly. Finally, education quality is impacted by the varying degrees of property wealth within individual districts.

The funding roles for the state and local districts are not adequately defined. While most persons concede that school funding should be shared by both the state and local districts, there is no accepted rationale for the relative distribution of funding responsibilities. Nor is there recognition of how spending decisions should be made within school districts.

The current accounting systems for education also add to the problems. Because of inadequate systems, preliminary attempts to separate the "academic" and "social" costs in the schools have appeared to be an almost hopeless task.

Conclusion:

Adequate information about school and district expenditures is not available. However, the development of such information is crucial for quality measures and program delineation and re-design. More financial decisions should be made at the local levels. This will help to insure more accountability and will serve to improve education quality.

Recommendations:

- Enhanced expenditure information is necessary to allow for the intelligent re-direction of existing resources to high priority programs that will improve education quality.
- Significant reform of the current "UFARS" accounting codes should occur such that spending delineations and analyses can occur for curriculum instruction, learning readiness, capital, administrative, extracurricular, staff development, and technology costs.
- Meaningful resource allocation decisions should be allowed to occur at the school level. Principals and teachers should be provided training and support necessary to effectively act in such capacities. School boards and district offices should strive for a culture that supports and encourages school site management.
- The state's proportional share of education funding should be sufficient to insure the provision of a basic level of education for all Minnesota students. The social services portion of this basic level should involve participation by state and local public and non-profit agencies and by local businesses and other community-based organizations.
- The local share of the basic education formula should be used to supplement the basic level of education and/or to finance such activities as capital costs, administrative and co-curricular activity costs.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Commissioner of Education should initiate a reform of district financial accounting which is consistent with the recommendations held in the Legislative Auditor's Report on School District Spending (February 1990). The Legislature should provide the needed encouragement and resources to allow this reform to occur.
- The business community should offer its assistance and systems expertise in the financial reform process.
- The Legislature should enact initiatives which increase the state share of education funding and the equalization of levy referenda, and should develop a rationale for the distribution of funding responsibilities between the state and individual districts.



TEACHING

Many problems involving the teaching profession impede education reform.

Laws and practices providing for teacher compensation and job security inhibit quality improvement. On the one hand, it is often very difficult to remove teachers who are not qualified or not performing. On the other hand, it is difficult to adequately reward and compensate those teachers or groups of teachers whose performance is stellar.

Under the current system, teachers are compensated on the basis of their length of service and graduate school credits. Measures of school and teacher effectiveness do not affect compensation or tenure.

In part because of these problems, but for other reasons as well, high quality college students are not attracted to teaching as a career. Teacher training is often perceived as inadequate, and little effort is placed on the retraining of quality people from other disciplines to serve in the teaching corps.

Teachers are often encumbered with activities and programs that interfere with their ability to learn and teach and to participate in decision-making and policy-setting. Even in schools where class size has been reduced, too much of the time and energy of teachers is absorbed by meeting the unmet social and developmental needs of their students.

Teachers strive to do a good job, and yet few feel as if they are treated as professionals. Many feel underpaid, see no career paths, and have no time or resources for meaningful professional development.

Conclusion:

Many factors impair the ability of teachers to be full participants in education reform initiatives. Among these factors are our current practices providing for the compensation and development of teachers. Simultaneously, our systems hinder our ability to provide compensation and support for teachers as individuals and teaching as a profession. Teaching is not perceived as an attractive career path for the best and brightest students, especially in key areas such as science and math.

Recommendations:

- Differentiated staffing programs should be implemented which would encourage professional movement and advancement within the teaching profession.
- A system of peer evaluation of teachers should be developed which provides for effective evaluation of teaching performance. Teachers should be compensated on the basis of school or team performance.
- Private sector involvement with teacher development, especially in the areas of math and science, should be encouraged.
- Schools of education should consider combining social work education with teacher training to better equip potential teachers with the skills necessary for the job.
- Teachers should be freed from non-curricular responsibilities so as to be able to concentrate on their roles as the primary coaches of the academic agenda.
- Teachers should be provided training, technical assistance and on-going support so that they will be better able to assist in education decision-making as part of administrative de-centralization.

Implementation Strategy:

- Minnesota's business and community leaders should express strong support for teaching as a profession and for positive change in the support and development of the profession.
- The Minnesota Business Partnership and other major state employers should develop in-company programs designed to encourage teacher training and development.
- The Minnesota Business Partnership should collaborate with the Minnesota High Technology Council in the recruitment of math and science teachers.
- The Legislature should enact legislation encouraging districts and unions to implement peer evaluation systems for teachers.
- The State Board of Teaching should devise and the Legislature should support alternative certification programs for teaching.



CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The racial and cultural diversity of Minnesota classrooms are changing dramatically. Although these changes are occurring most rapidly in center-city schools, they will soon be felt throughout the state.

For some communities of color in Minnesota, our schools seem to be almost irrelevant. Pro-found cultural differences inhibit learning by many students.

The demographic and cultural changes occurring in Minnesota's population provide immense opportunity for positive improvement in our schools. However, we must have the systems, personnel and infrastructure in place to respond most effectively to these changes. It is important for the schools to strengthen their commitment to reflect this diversity. Schools, districts and the state must show a greater commitment to increasing the diversity of those in teaching and administrative positions.

An insufficient number of teachers of color are attracted to teaching, and too few are retained. Furthermore, many teachers and school administrators have not had opportunities to develop skills and attitudes to handle the increasing cultural diversity in Minnesota schools.

Conclusion:

Growing cultural diversity is an important feature of our schools and needs to be embraced.

Recommendations:

- Programs which recognize and support cultural diversity should be encouraged.
- Mechanisms which encourage students of color to enter the teaching profession should be developed, including a teacher and administrator recruitment program involving key colleges and universities and junior and senior high schools with sizeable enrollments of Hispanic, African-American, American Indian, and Asian students.
- The development of a richer, multicultural curriculum should be encouraged and supported. This effort is especially needed in many of our learning readiness programs.
- The state Department of Education's programs regarding cultural diversity should be supported.
- Initial teacher preparation programs, staff development programs, and selection criteria for all teachers and principals should include appropriate aspects of cultural diversity.

Implementation Strategy:

- The state's political, business and civic leaders should strongly encourage the state department and local school boards to aggressively pursue the planning, development and implementation of multicultural, gender-fair programs.
- The Department of Education, working in cooperation with minority groups, higher education and the business community, should implement a coordinated teacher recruitment program focusing on Minnesota's minority communities.



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Schools need to improve and expand the opportunities they provide for parental involvement. Research has shown that when parents are involved in their child's education, the student will have a higher rate of achievement and is less likely to drop out.

Adequate parental involvement does not mean once-a-year attendance at parent-teacher conferences, nor does it mean monthly attendance at PTA meetings. Truly effective parental involvement is meaningful and consistent interaction throughout the school experience.

Increasing parental involvement is not an easy task. Many parents have demands and life circumstances that make this involvement difficult. Further, school logistics and timetables often fail to recognize parental realities.

Problems are especially acute for the growing numbers of pregnant and parenting students, and for single parents of all ages. (In 1988, 40.8% of births in Minneapolis were to unmarried women.) These and related problems are not limited to the center cities. They occur in every geographic location and at all income levels albeit to varying degrees.

School systems, along with many other social institutions, have not adequately responded to these changes in American life. It is not enough simply to call for increased parental involvement. Care must be taken to insure that the methods for such involvement will in fact accommodate these social realities.

Conclusion:

Parental involvement and support for student learning in the schools is lacking in far too many circumstances.

Recommendations:

- The role of the parent as the primary support for the student must be acknowledged and sustained. The parent's key "line" role in the achievement of learning readiness must be supported by schools.
- Parental involvement mechanisms must be restructured to reflect changing family realities. More attention must be given to the needs of pregnant and parenting students.
- Private sector programs (including business, civic groups, media, and churches) should be developed to encourage and allow adequate, positive parental involvement and promote student learning.
- Location of early childhood and school facilities on or near business premises should be promoted and encouraged.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Minnesota Business Partnership and other businesses should encourage all employers to voluntarily expand parent involvement programs and should support community-based programs to expand public awareness of the importance of parent involvement.
- Minnesota employers should be generous in providing paid leave for parent participation in school volunteer programs, and should give paid leave for parents to visit parent-teacher conferences.
- Businesses should consider establishing on-site school and day care programs, especially programs targeted to at-risk populations such as pregnant and parenting teens.



STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

Student employment is growing at very rapid rates. It is estimated that some 65% of Minnesota secondary school students who are eligible do in fact work. For many students, work is used as a way to generate disposable income; for others, it is an economic necessity.

No one clearly understands the impact of student employment on learning and academic achievement. Proponents of student work contend that it has social development value. Proponents also say that the income generated allows some students to stay in school who would otherwise be forced to quit in order to help support their families.

Opponents of student work contend that work often interferes with the requirements of learning; physically tired students simply cannot learn. In addition, work critics often contend that students working at "menial" jobs are not furthering their educational experience.

Few employers relate a student's academic performance to their work situation. Even fewer employers evaluate a student's school performance before making a hiring decision.

Conclusion:

Student work can be a positive experience for the student and an important part of the economic environment of the region. However, "excessive" student employment (as defined for each individual student) unquestionably hurts classroom performance.

Recommendations:

- Businesses should be encouraged to cooperatively and voluntarily establish guidelines for student employment which would limit the number of working hours so as to not impair the ability to learn. In addition, businesses should limit work eligibility to students whose academic performance is satisfactory.
- Employers should work cooperatively with local secondary schools in identifying positive work opportunities. Efforts should be made to find work situations that could simultaneously result in income and course credits for students.

Implementation Strategy:

- The Minnesota Business Partnership, along with other business organizations, should initiate the development of statewide voluntary guidelines to be used by employers in hiring student workers.
- Business organizations should also develop techniques and practices for the appropriate use of high school transcripts in hiring, and they should develop student work opportunities that have educational as well as financial value to students.
- The Legislature and the Departments of Labor & Industry and Education should refrain from enacting additional limitations on student work, but they should monitor student employment closely.



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For additional information or copies contact:



IDS CENTER

Minneapolis, Minnesota 55402

612/370-0840 (Fax) 612/334-3086